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ing's Straits he found the water lying in layers of different temperatures. First a cool, then a warm, and beneath that a cold stratum of water! For a time I was at a loss to account for this, but upon subsequent reflection it occurred to me that this was a natural arrangement of waters of different specific gravities. That of the lowest temperature being the densest, clings to the bottom—the warmest water, from the salt it contains, being next in weight overlies the first, and then the cool fresh water formed by the dissolution of the ice, floats on the surface and is carried with, and becomes a part of the current immediately underlying it. This arrangement seems, too, to be a wise provision of Nature, by which the warm current is insulated, as it were, to prevent too great a loss of its temperature whilst passing the region of ice, but which, after reaching the open sea, and having by that time warmed the water above, it spreads out, whilst at rest for a time about the Pole, and throws off by the atmosphere much of its warmth before starting on its return course to the south again.

So it will be seen that a sub-surface temperature by the use of Six's thermometer, should be taken, as well as the surface temperature, whenever the latter is not above that of the atmosphere.

With renewed thanks for your goodness,
 I am, very respectfully,
 Your ob't serv't,
 SILAS BENT.

III.—*The Northmen in America.* By the Rev. B. F. DE COSTA.

Read December 17, 1868.

The first voyage to America of which we have any account was performed by the Northmen. But who were the Northmen?

The Northmen were the descendants of a race that in early times left Asia, travelled towards the north, and settled in the present territory of Denmark. From thence they overran Sweden and Norway, afterwards colonizing Iceland and Greenland. Their language was the old Danish (*Dönsk tunga*), once spoken all over the north, but now preserved in Iceland alone.

The first of these settlers reached Iceland in the year 875, when the Irish monks, who were there before, at once fled.

As it forms no part of my plan to trace the progress of colonization in Iceland, it will be sufficient to say that the new country continued to flourish, and in the course of time possessed a population of 60,000 souls.

At the close of the tenth century a westward movement was inaugurated by one Eric the Red, who had been banished the isle for manslaughter. At this time there was a rumor abroad that in the previous century, in the year 876, a man named Gunnbiorn, who was driven westward in a storm, had seen a new land, which was known by the people as "Gunnbiorn's Rocks." Accordingly Eric resolved to go in search of this land.

It is recorded that Eric sailed westward and found land, and afterwards returned. The next summer he sailed once more for Greenland, with a fleet of thirty-five ships, only fourteen of which reached their destination, the rest being either driven back or lost. This event took place fifteen winters before the introduction of Christianity into Iceland, which was accomplished in the year A. D. 1000. The date of Eric's second voyage must therefore be set down at 985. From this time the colonists rapidly increased in numbers.

The colonies were not established, as was formerly supposed, on the eastern coast of Greenland, but on the western coast, some distance northward of Cape Farewell. The expedition of Captain Graah, who was sent out to the east coast by the Danish Government, satisfactorily proved that no Icelandic settlements were ever established in the east. On the west coast are found the ruins of houses and churches. The walls of one church now standing are from four to five feet thick, which shows how solidly they built. Tombstones are also found inscribed with runic letters.

The colonies in Greenland continued to thrive until the beginning of the fifteenth century. A line of seventeen bishops expired with Andreas about the year 1409, nearly a century before the time of Columbus. In that year Bishop Andreas celebrated the marriage of a couple in the Cathedral Church at Gardá, from whom the learned Professor Finn Magnussen derived his descent. This is the very last transaction in Greenland of which we have any account, until after the rediscovery of the western continent.

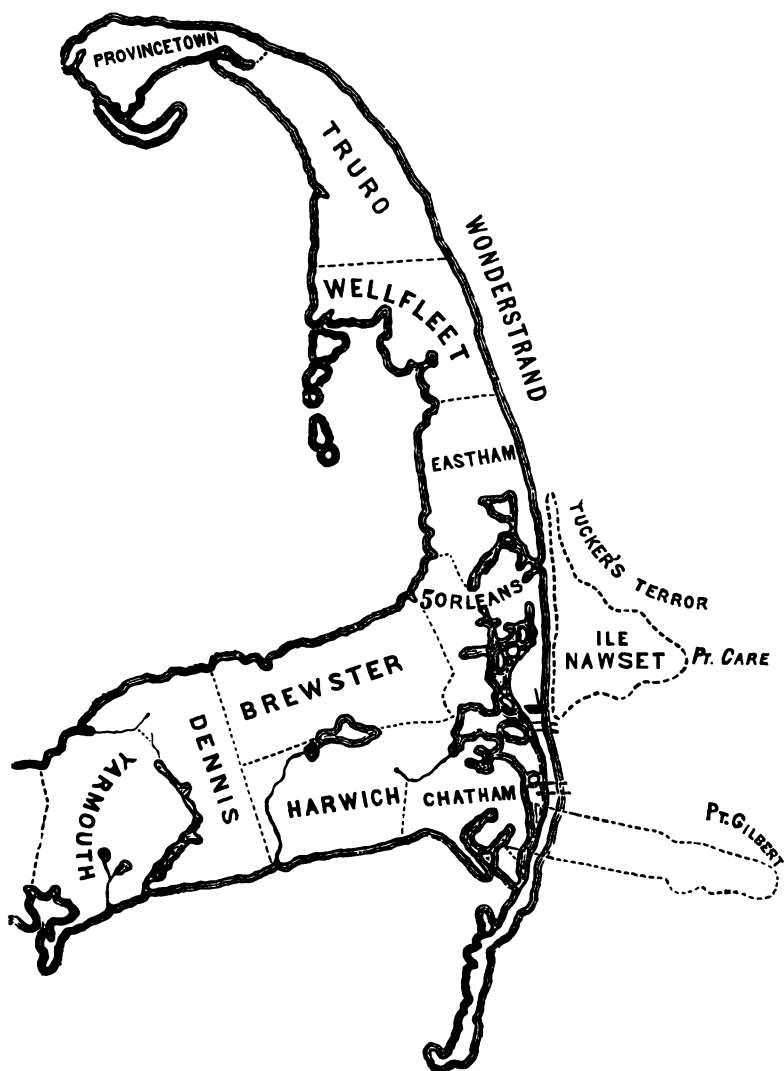
Thus we find that the Northmen occupied Greenland for a period of no less than three hundred years. It was during this period that they made their voyages to the coast of New England. But before proceeding to speak of the voyages it may be interesting to glance at what they accomplished in the north.

At the last meeting of this Society we were favored with an able, exhaustive, and highly interesting lecture on Arctic Discovery in recent times, by one whose name will always be associated with the great efforts to reach the Polar Sea. Yet in this department the modern navigator has been somewhat anticipated by the men of the north.

Filled with their innate love of adventure, the Icelandic colonists in Greenland sought to increase their knowledge of that entire region, and to push their discoveries still further into the frozen region that surrounds the Pole. In the year 1824, when Parry was working his way towards the north, he found, to his great surprise, an inscribed monument on an island in lat. 73° . On his return a copy of the inscription was sent to Denmark, when it was found that the stone was placed in its position by three Icelandic explorers on the Saturday before Ascension Week in the year 1135. In the year 1266 a remarkable voyage was performed under the direction of the clergy, and a circumstantial account of it was transmitted by the Priest Haldor to Arnold, Chaplain to King Magnus of Norway. The voyage was made in a six-oared boat, and was attended by much hardship and suffering, although performed at the close of July. On the twenty-fifth of that month, noted as the festival of St. James, these explorers reached a point computed by Prof. Rafn to have been in the parallel of $75^{\circ} 46'$. Thus the bold Northmen, in a single boat, reached as high a latitude in 1266 as Parry attained in 1827.

But let us turn to consider their achievements in a more southern latitude on our own shores.

I need not delay here to show that they had ample means for the performance of the voyage. Their ships and their nautical knowledge were sufficient for the undertaking, while no one could question their daring enterprise. The Northmen were a people of no inferior attainments, but constituted the most enterprising portion of the race. They were fitted above all the men of their time for the work of exploration beyond the seas. They had made themselves known in every part of the civilized world by their daring as soldiers and navigators. Straying away into the distant east from whence they originally came, we see them laying the foundation of the Russian empire, swinging their battle-axes in the streets of Constantinople, carving their mystic runes upon the Lions of the Areopagus, and filling the heart of even the great Charlemagne with dismay. Says Dasent, when summing up their achievements: "In Byzantium they are the



A MAP OF CAPE COD AS IT APPEARED AT THE BEGINNING OF
THE 17TH CENTURY.

leaders of the Greek emperor's body guard, and the main support of his tottering throne. From France, led by Rollo, they tear away her fairest province and found a long line of kings. In Saxon England they are the bosom friends of such kings as Athelstane, and the sworn foes of Ethelred the Unready. In Danish England they are the foremost among the thanes of Canute, Swein, and Hardicanute, and keep down the native population with an iron heel."

This being so, is it unreasonable to suppose that they succeeded in reaching America?

Look for a moment at the map. When the Northman had reached Iceland he was far on his way to America. But a short voyage was required to reach its most northern part, which is Greenland. And from the southern coast of Greenland to Labrador is another short voyage, and from thence to the coast of New England the way is plain, and the ever-softening sky and air unite to allure the navigator on. Indeed, the only improbability exists in supposing that a people like the Northmen, who had left their footprints in every other part of the world, were capable of living for a period of three hundred years on the western coast of Greenland without raising a practical inquiry in regard to what countries lay beyond. To suppose that these men were thus idle and inefficient, is simply preposterous. Still the decision, in the absence of monuments like those of Greenland, turns upon a question of *fact*. The point is this: *Do the manuscripts which describe these voyages belong to the pre-Columbian age?* If so, then the Northmen are entitled to the credit of the prior discovery of America. That these manuscripts belong to the pre-Columbian age, is as capable of demonstration as the fact that the writings of Homer existed prior to the age of Christ.

The Flatö MSS., which contain the sagas relating to America, and now preserved in the Archives at Copenhagen, were finished in the present form in the year 1387, or 1395 at the latest, a whole century before the voyage of Columbus. The MSS. exist in their purity. They have not been tampered with or interpolated by post-Columbian writers. Now, a mineralogist who takes up a piece of quartz filled with particles of gold can tell in a moment whether that gold was originally infused into the rock by the process of nature, or was recently introduced by some scheming speculator. And I need hardly tell you that a literary expert can point out an interpolation in an old manuscript with equal facility. Yet the most careful scrutiny fails to detect interpolations.

Nevertheless fault has been found with these writings, by a few persons who are determined to doubt in the face of all testimony. The objections brought against the substance of the narratives are extremely feeble; yet I may nevertheless glance at them.

As a specimen of the objections, I may allude first to the fact that the Sagas relating to America contain supernatural statements. It has also been charged that these writings are of a mythological character; yet as the latter charge is not based on any proper acquaintance with the Icelandic writings, I will pass it by. As is well known, the Northmen had an extensive and complete system of Mythology, yet it has not corrupted the histories under consideration, which form the earliest, purest, and the best prose to be found in the entire range of modern European literature.

Yet it is undeniable that there are supernatural statements. It is said that on one occasion a woman after her death rose up in her bed and spoke, and that another saw a spectre at her side. For such reasons some persons would dismiss the narratives as fabulous. But, on the same principle, how much recent history could we also dismiss to the realms of fable. Those who bring this objection forget that we have not yet altogether abandoned the idea of ghosts, while in the witchcraft prosecutions in Massachusetts grave judges condemned and ordered the execution of men on what was called "spectral testimony." The greatest New England divine of his day, the Rev. Cotton Mather, often adorned the historical sketches of that part of our country with tales of spectres and ghosts. Why, then, should we complain of an Icelandic writer who wrote several centuries earlier, when the world was vastly more superstitious than now, because he took occasion to make a passing reference of the kind?

Another objects that one narrative speaks of a "Uniped" seen in the distance on the shore. The word would indicate a human being with only one leg; but when Hendrick Hudson visited this coast six hundred years later, did he not see, among other wonders, a live *mermaid*? We all remember the description of one is given in his voyage. Columbus in his first voyage saw *three* mermaids; and also passed near an island inhabited, etc., not by Unipeds, but by "Amazons." So Josselyn, who visited New England in 1638, speaks of a "Triton," whatever that may be; and tells us that a fisherman chopped off the hands of one that tried to get into his boat.

There is another objection, that I would not allude to, but

for the fact that it has been urged by a distinguished writer, who says that the location of Vinland, the seat of the Icelandic settlements, has been sought for everywhere between Nova Scotia and Africa. The Icelandic records, however, give no support to his statement. On this point the Sagas say: "Beyond Greenland, southward, is Helluland (Labrador); beyond that is Markland (Nova Scotia); from thence it is *not far* to Vinland, which *some* men are of the opinion extends to Africa." The Saga writer, however, does not sanction the opinion, and the objection falls to the ground. Besides, if he *had* said that Vinland extended to Africa, it would not have made the location of the place uncertain. Every one acquainted with our early history knows that at one time Virginia extended over this whole country, while many supposed that this land extended to India. Yet when the navigator left England for Virginia he laid his course direct for the mouth of James river. The same was the case with the Northmen in sailing for Vinland. However far that country may have extended, they knew just where to look for the site of their colony.

But, finally, one has objected to the truth of the Icelandic Sagas for the reason that he thinks the productions of the country described do not answer to the inventory of the Northmen.

The particular thing objected to is a piece of rare wood for which it is difficult, with certainty, to assign a name or use. The piece of wood in question was carried from the shores of New England to Iceland, and from thence to Norway, where the possessor sold it for a handsome sum. It is called *macer* wood, and may have been a piece of very handsome maple. But the objector argues from the PRICE that it must have been a piece of wood that did not grow in New England, that it must have been Brazil-wood or rare mahogany. Therefore the alleged voyages of the Northmen did not take place. Such persons overlook the fact that explorers are liable to give too favorable views of the productions of a country they have discovered. Eric the Red gave Greenland the name it now bears simply to make a favorable impression of its qualities. Some of his stories were almost fabulous, yet who denies that he ever saw Greenland? In the early days of Puritan New England there was the same misrepresentation of Massachusetts Bay, and Governor Dudley was obliged to put in a protest against it. So, on the coast of Maine, George Popham wrote home to his patron from Sagadahoc, that among the productions found were "cinna-

mon and nutmegs." Now, on the principle of the objector, we ought to hold that Popham never saw the coast of Maine.

But the Icelandic writer was more judicious. He did not claim to find any cinnamon or nutmegs, nor even mahogany or Brazil-wood, but simply a piece of handsome wood that in Norway brought a high price. The objection, therefore, exists only in the minds of those who made it.

But let us now speak of the voyages themselves.

The first glimpse of America was obtained by one Biarne, who, in sailing for Greenland, in the year 986, was driven upon the American coast by a storm. The report of this voyage induced Leif, son of Eric the Red, to seek for the new land. In the year 1000 he sailed from Greenland, passed down the American coast, coasted around Cape Cod, and entered Mount Hope Bay in the State of Rhode Island, where he built huts or booths, and spent the winter. In the spring he returned to Greenland with a cargo of wood and furs.

In the year 1002 his brother Thorvald visited the same place, where he wintered, and the following spring sailed around Cape Cod to Massachusetts Bay. Off what is now called Race Point, they broke the keel of their vessel, and landed to make a new one. The old one was set up as a landmark, and the place was called Kiarlarness, or Cape of the Keel, which is indicated by the accompanying map. They next sailed across towards Plymouth. This region of country pleased them highly. From thence they appear to have coasted along the shore towards Boston. Near a place now called Point Alderton, they were attacked by the natives, when Thorvald was slain by an arrow. At his own request he was buried at a spot near Plymouth, and crosses were placed at the head and foot of his grave. The expedition then returned to Greenland. Thorstein, his brother, went afterwards to bring home his body, but failed to find the place, and returned to Greenland, where he died.

These, and all the subsequent voyages to America, it will be seen, were made from Greenland, and not from Iceland.

The most distinguished explorer was Thorfinn Karlsefne, who sailed with three vessels and one hundred and sixty men in the spring of 1007. They spent the greater portion of three years in that part of Rhode Island lying around Mount Hope Bay. Here his son Snorre was born. This child was afterwards educated in Iceland and became the first of the line of Bishops that have presided over the ecclesiastical affairs of that country. From him also was descended Thorwaldsen the sculptor, who placed in the Cathedral

Church of Reikiavik, in Iceland, a beautiful font in acknowledgment of his Icelandic descent. As I intend to allude again to the voyage of Karlsefne, I will only mention one very curious and valuable proof of the authenticity of his narrative. While his party were at Mount Hope Bay, which was also called "Hop" by the Northmen, they had a severe fight with the natives, who used a curious instrument of warfare. The writer says: "Karlsefne's people saw that they raised upon a pole a very large ball, something like a sheep's paunch, and of a blue color; this they swung from the pole over Karlsefne's men, upon the ground, and it made a great noise as it fell down. This caused great fear with Karlsefne's men." And, so far as my knowledge extends, the antiquarians have never given any explanation of this passage, which at first sounds childish. But by referring to Schoolcraft's work on the Indians (vol. i., p. 83), we find that such an instrument was actually employed in this country at a very early period. Schoolcraft says that many generations ago the natives used to sew up a round boulder in the skin of an animal, and hang it upon a pole which was borne by several warriors, and when brought down suddenly upon a group of men produced consternation and death. This mode of warfare has not been practised for the last three hundred years, but must have prevailed about the period that the Northmen were in America.

The last voyage of which we have an account took place in 1011, chiefly under the direction of a woman, a sister of Leif Ericson, named Freydis, who, with the assistance of her confederates, murdered a whole ship's crew in one of her quarrels. She passed but one winter in New England.

What are called the Minor Narratives refer to a voyage of Are Marson to a land southwest of Iceland, called Whiteman's Land, or Great Ireland. This was prior to Leif's voyage, taking place in the year 983. Biorn Asbrandson is supposed to have gone to the same place in the year 999.

But where was this Whiteman's Land, or Great Ireland? The saga which gives the account of Marson's voyage says that it lies "in the Western Ocean opposite Vinland, six days' sail west of Ireland." Prof. Rafn thought that this country was Florida, and that in course of time the numerals VI. had taken the place of the larger and correct number of days' sail, which would afford the navigator sufficient time to reach that part of the coast of America. But in this, perhaps, Prof. Rafn shows too much anxiety. The learned Finn Magnussen accepts VI. as the right number, while

Schöning points to the Azores as Great Ireland. To a place bearing this name the Iclander, Marson, undoubtedly went, though we cannot now fix its precise locality. Nor is this needed in order to assure us of the reality of the pre-Columbian discovery of America. The voyages to New England being established beyond all reasonable question, we can well afford to abstain from any false construction of the Minor Narratives, and, indeed, dispense with them altogether.

After the voyage of Freydis to New England in 1011 we have no other narratives, though there are *allusions* to voyages. We find that Bishop Eric, after his consecration as Bishop of Greenland, resigned that See, and, in the year 1121, sailed on a voyage to Vinland. So likewise we find that in 1285 New Land was rediscovered by the Northmen. It was called *Nyja-funda Land*—a name that may *possibly* have suggested the modern Newfoundland; while in 1357 a voyage was made to Markland, the present Nova Scotia, to cut timber. With these brief notices the narratives come to an end; and the Greenland Colonies having died out, the new land in the west ceased to be an object of interest with the people of the North, who gave the subject no attention until the world was aroused by the discoveries of Columbus. Then the old sagas were brought out from the Library of the Monastery in Flåtö announcing the pre-Columbian discovery of America.

It may be asked, Why did the discoveries of the Northmen in the eleventh century create no sensation? The answer is very simple. The age was not ripe for discovery. The compass and the printing press were still unknown, the ocean was an object of dread, while the Northmen themselves had not the faintest conception of the value of their work. Adam of Bremen was one of the few persons in Europe who ever heard of the trans-Atlantic voyages, and he only mentions them incidentally.

The position of the Icelandic Colonies in America was at first supposed to have been in the region of Nova Scotia, but the more accurate calculations of Prof. Rafn and others have fixed the position in Rhode Island, in latitude $41^{\circ} 24' 10''$. The scientific process by which this result was worked out need not here be detailed, especially as we are able to identify the localities from the descriptions of the sagas themselves. To this point let us now turn our attention for a few minutes.

The first land made by the Northmen after they left Greenland was Labrador. This they called *Helluland*, from

Hellu, a flat stone, many of which are found in that region, being of great size. After landing here, they sailed south again and found a flat country overgrown with wood. Then Leif said, "We shall give this land a name according to its kind;" accordingly he called it Markland, or Woodland. This, with all reason, is supposed to have been Nova Scotia. The description of the saga accords well with that of the coast pilot. Sailing thence for two days, with a northeast wind, they at last came in sight of an island that lay on the north side of the land. This land was Cape Cod. The voyage from Nova Scotia to Cape Cod is one which a good ship, under favorable circumstances, could easily accomplish within the specified time, though the time is not expressed in the saga with any scientific exactness. Leif evidently sailed these two days with at least a strong breeze, for the saga says that on reaching the land they disembarked upon an island to wait for good weather. This island has given the interpreters considerable trouble, from the fact that it is said to lie to the northward of the land. Prof. Rafn shows that the north point of the Icelandic compass lay towards the east, but this does not fairly meet the case. There would, perhaps, have been no difficulty in the interpretation, if he had been acquainted with the fact, that in early times an island existed on the opposite coast of Cape Cod. This island, together with a large point of land, has now disappeared. Its position, as well as with the point of land, is delineated in the map. At one time, some doubt existed in regard to the truthfulness of the accounts, for the reason that those portions of land described no longer existed, yet their positions were laid down with scientific accuracy by Gosnold; the outer portion of the island being called Point Care, and the other Point Gilbert. Neither Archer nor Brereton in their accounts of Gosnold's voyage, gives the name of the island: but Captain John Smith, in 1614, calls it "Isle Nawset." This island was of the drift formation, and as late as half a century ago, a portion of it still remained, being called Slut Bush. The subject has been very carefully gone into by Mr. Otis, in his pamphlet on the *Discovery of an Ancient Ship on Cape Cod*. Professor Agassiz, writing December 17, 1863, says: "Surprising and perhaps incredible as the statements of Mr. Amos Otis may appear, they are nevertheless the direct and natural inference of the observations which may be easily made along the eastern coast of Cape Cod. Having of late felt a special interest in the geological structure of that remarkable region,

I have repeatedly visited it during the past summer, and, in company with Mr. Otis, examined, on one occasion, with the most minute care, the evidence of the former existence of Isle Nawset and Point Gilbert. I found it as satisfactory as any geological evidence can be. Besides its scientific interest," he adds, "this result has some historical importance. At all events it fully vindicates Archer's account of the aspect of Cape Cod, at the time of its discovery in 1602, and shows him to have been a truthful and accurate observer."

Now, in all this Prof. Agassiz had no idea of vindicating the Northmen. Still he has unwittingly left a testimony in their favor, by declaring the former existence of the island. Since the days of the Northmen great changes have taken place in this whole region, which affords the most interesting subject for geological discussion to be found on the Atlantic coast. Glance at the map drawn from the plans of the U. S. C. Survey, and you will see how extensively the work of denudation has gone on, the shores of Cape Cod and Nantucket having beautiful rounded lines formed by the action of the sea, which is now rapidly cutting away the whole region. The banks and shoals of Georges, lying to the eastward of the cape, are nothing but dead islands that once lifted their verdure-crowned heads above the waves. If Prof. Rafn had known of the existence of this great island, and the point called Point Gilbert, he would never have forced the language of the sagas so to make Nantucket the island referred to. What was called Webb's Island, which in 1790 lay nine miles out at sea, may have been a remnant of Point Gilbert. It is laid down in the map of Nicholas Sanson, in 1688.

In the account of Karlsefne's voyage there is another passage that is cleared up by Prof. Agassiz's demonstration of the existence of the island.

It is said that here they called the land *Wonder-strand*, because they were so long in going by, yet whoever sails along this shore now, will not be impressed by the length of the voyage. This is because the coast has completely changed, and the shore line has been reduced one-half or two-thirds by the destruction of the islands and projecting points. Leif also put into this place, and landed for safety in a northeast storm, which could not be done to-day; yet at that time the configuration of the coast was such as to afford numerous snug harbors. The writer of Karlsefne's voyage speaks of the long shores of sand at Kiarlarness, for which this region

is noted, and where, as he says, there were no harbors. Yet when he came to the island and passed into the bay between Isle Nawset and Point Gilbert, he found a harbor in which they anchored for three days. Likewise Archer, in his account of Gosnold's voyage, says, that when they rounded Point Care, the extremity of Isle Nawset, "We bore up again with the land, and in the night, came with it anchoring in eight fathoms." At this point, the narrative of Karlsefne says, "the land became indented with coves," and Gosnold's voyage curiously records the same feature. But now island and headland and coves have all gone down beneath the waves, and the whole coast presents a smooth, melancholy waste.

There are many minor points wherein the descriptions of the Northmen happily agree with this coast and its productions, yet there is not now time to dwell upon them. I may, however, allude to the fact that the expedition of Karlsefne passed around the cape from Rhode Island to the vicinity of Boston, where, you remember, the leader of one expedition was mortally wounded in a fight with the natives. And here they came to a conclusion which we now know to be a fact. From this point they saw what must have been the celebrated Blue Hill Range, and they inferred that it was the same range that they had seen near their settlement at Mount Hope Bay. The writer, in recording the voyage, says: "They looked upon the mountain range that was at Hop, and that which they now found, as all one." And by a reference to the map, we find that the Blue Hill Range actually extends across the country to the vicinity of Mount Hope Bay.

In Greenland the monumental remains of the Northmen are abundant, but it is to be questioned whether anything of the kind will ever be found in New England, the celebrated Dighton Rock, the Newport Mill, and the skeleton in armor found at Fall River, being now hardly considered as relics of the Northmen.

Besides, monumental evidence is not needed. The authenticity of the Icelandic records has been vindicated, and their historical character has been placed beyond reasonable question. We must also remember that the occupation of the country by the Northmen was only temporary. Thorfinn Karlsefne spent about three years in his visit, finally discovering that he could not maintain himself against the hostile tribes. Leif, in his voyage of the year 1030, erected several houses of wood, which, with a few additions, answered the

purpose of those who afterwards came; yet these and all similar memorials must have soon passed away. Besides, if they had built structures of stone as strong as the Pyramids, on Isle Nawset or Point Gilbert, or, indeed, anywhere on the littoral parts of the New England coast, they would long since have been buried in the sea.

And it is proper, before closing, to refer to the fact that there have been changes in the inhabitants as well as in the land. The people with whom Karlsefne fought had the habits but not the general appearance of the North American Indians, being short of stature like the Esquimaux. Nor can this circumstance detract from the value of the narratives. For everything goes to indicate that the present inhabitants of Greenland and vicinity once must have dwelt along the New England coast, and that they have gradually made their way towards the north with the walrus, the great auk, and the polar bear. The great auk has, as you are doubtless well aware, left the New England coast within modern times. Professor Wyman recently found some of the bones of this bird in the shell-heaps of Mount Desert, Me. The Esquimaux at an early date followed the retreat of the ice-period which prevailed on the coast to the north, and those met by the Icelanders in Massachusetts and Rhode Island were a portion of the tribe left behind. This is in accordance with the well-known fact that the North American Indians claimed no antiquity as possessors of the soil, and that the oldest distribution of the roving American tribes does not date back further than the tenth century, when the ancestors of the Aztecs went southward, and settled in Mexico.

But though the ancient people of New England have passed away, and large portions of land have gone down beneath the sea, the immortal histories of Iceland remain. These are daily becoming better understood, and with the study of the records invariably comes the conviction of their truth. As I reminded you at the outset, we are here called to credit no inferior people. The Northmen came of a noble stock. Some of us listened last evening* to a glowing tribute to their character, in which, however, they were alluded to as pirates. But the allusion was not unjust. Still we must remember that they were pirates in an age when might made right, and piracy was more or less respectable. And they often fought for the noblest prize, for

* The Lecture of the Hon. John Lothrop Motley, on the occasion of the anniversary of the New York Historical Society.

a kingdom and crown. They were magnificent pirates, for only such could have made the heart of Charlemagne quake with fear. But they always gave as much as they took; since it was the infusion of their blood, and the invigorating force of their brain, that made the feeblar peoples whom they conquered capable of conquering others in turn. Besides, wherever they were victorious with the sword, they ruled with their speech. Their language was the language of the Court, not only in Denmark and Norway, but in England and France; and to-day, while the language of King Alfred and his contemporaries is known only to a few, and the splendid tongues of Greece and Rome are likewise dead, the language of the Northman is alive, and is spoken with all its old-time purity and power.

Again, let me say, if the Northmen were pirates, they were a people of progress, and the first to pronounce piracy a crime. Their vikings and rovers had all been called peacefully home at a time when the moral sense of the southern nations slumbered, and the freebooters of England were sailing on every sea. They were still further in advance on the subject of the duel. In England the duel was retained on the statute-book as a part of the judicial process, eight hundred and six years after the Northmen had solemnly abolished that cruel and barbarous custom by a positive law.

One other thing we must remember, namely, that piracy was confined to the Continent. In those early days ships sailed on peaceful trading voyages from Iceland to Shetland, to the Orkneys, to Dublin, to Limerick, to the ports of England and Scotland; and, returning, these white-winged messengers flew, as doves to their windows, for the Icelandic ports beyond the cold sea. But among them all there was no pirate. No freebooter's ship ever sailed out from an Icelandic harbor, to indulge in pillage on the main. That country was settled by the *élite* of Norway, by men who constituted its best element, and who were too proud to yield obedience to a tyrannical king. They were the Pilgrim Fathers of the North, who, above all things, desired to be free. And the freedom which they sought they gained. In their lonely isle they founded an aristocratic republic, raised up an imperishable literature, and compiled a wise and comprehensive body of law.

And as their statesmanship was wise, so was their poetical genius great. America, with all her marvellous industry, has

yet to furnish a poetical work that will compare with the Edda of Iceland, in bold, original, and lofty genius, and immortal thought; and when the best compositions of the writers of to-day have been forgotten, the collections of Sæmund the Wise will have an honored place by the side of Homer and Milton, and hold an equal rank with Shakespeare, Tasso, and Dante.

In historical composition, the Northman appears equally commanding. Sturleson, of the north, the author of "Heimskringler," is a fit companion for Herodotus, his brother of the south. In Iceland, history was cultivated with a zeal that has characterized no people or age before or since. We find that it even spread to Greenland itself, where it is recorded that in the winter before Karlsefne sailed on his three-years' expedition to New England, the people through the long evenings were accustomed to assemble around the driftwood fires, to listen to historical recitations. And it is these men, who set up the printing press a hundred years before the founding of Plymouth, men whose spirit and enterprise have never been surpassed,—that sailed from Greenland, explored the American coast, and inscribed the history of their achievements in the chronicles of the north. And if men like these are not to be credited when they declare that they discovered the American coast, it is time that we had discarded all chronicles and bidden ancient history a long farewell.

I have thus far said little of Columbus, for the reason that little needs to be said. The discovery of America by the Northmen detracts nothing from the merit of the work of Columbus. The patience and courage and perseverance, and, above all, the lofty faith of that great navigator, have made his name glorious for all time. His was an independent discovery; and since the justice due to the Northmen requires no depreciation of Columbus, so the justice due to *Columbus* demands no depreciation of the *Northmen*. Honor to the noble and the brave of every age and clime! For whoever, by fortitude, patience, and self-denial, increases our knowledge of Geography, contributes to one of the noblest of sciences, and adds to the dignity and happiness of mankind.